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THE NGONI POLITICAL SYSTEM

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royal women. In the royal villages in the 1930's there was one big *induna* and several lesser ones whose position and functions will be described in Chapter IV.

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This 'going out' of the new Paramount's village, leaving the former Paramount's village as the *gogo* village, brought about some re-distribution of authority, prestige and material goods. It gave the new Paramount his own village, always to be known as his, even after his death. His village became the focal meeting-place for the territory and for the court and territorial officials who surrounded the Paramount; and it was to the new royal village that the *alumuzana* in pre-European days came frequently to visit the Paramount and report to him on conditions in their areas. His moving out of the *gogo* village, on the other hand, gave his brothers who stayed there, and especially those of the *gogo* house, more freedom and authority within that village as well as responsibility for the conduct of all ritual matters relating to the kingdom. The Paramount's big wife had to take her place as the leading woman in the new village and to order the affairs of the wives attached to her house in consultation with the Paramount's mother. Cattle, beer and food for the royal household became the concern of the new village, and the *isinduna* and the royal women had to plan and manage the economy of a capital where political interests converged and where visitors and hangers-on were constantly turning up.

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The following text by Chief Mtwalo Jere in Mzimba district, helped by Cibambo's older brother, describes the daily routine of the Paramount and his royal village as they had known it in their youth before the coming of the Europeans:

¶ The *inkosi* had to wash very early before the people came to see him. The *ingceko* was the servant who took care of washing the *inkosi*. He had to go with the *inkosi* to the bush and hide the faeces to prevent any bad person from getting the faeces. The *ingceko* was anyone whom the *inkosi* called for this, and must be one who walks well with the *inkosi*.

Before leaving his house to go to the kraal the *inkosi* had to eat a little porridge. When he went to the kraal a calabash of beer was brought to him. When any beer was brought to the *inkosi*, the *ingceko* tasted it first to see if it was good. The *inkosi* asked 'Is it good beer?' and the *ingceko* said 'Yes *inkosi*' and gave it to the *inkosi* to drink. When the *inkosi* took snuff the big *alumuzana* could beg from him. The other *amadoda* could only touch their noses. Then the *inkosi* knew they were begging snuff from him. Where the *inkosi* sat a mat was spread, and on it was laid a leopard- or a lion-skin. This was called 'the chair of the *inkosi*'. On arrival the big *alumuzana* went straight into the kraal to where the *inkosi* sat and greeted him '*Bayets*', and sat down in front of him.

The *inkosi* could not eat porridge except that cooked by his own wives. In his own hut he ate alone with one wife to serve him. His mothers also came with food every day. He ate twice in his own hut, early and late, and once in the kraal. When he ate in the kraal all could see him. He could

THE PARAMOUNT

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not eat so much as other people. He must leave enough for others or he would be ashamed. He would take a few lumps of porridge from one wooden dish (*ingwenbe*) and then hand the other dishes to those around him. Each day one beast had to be killed from the house of each wife of the *inkosi* in turn. It was their food and they could not cease killing. The *inkosi* had his own great garden. After hoeing the *induna* of the *indlunkulu* called all the village people to come and plant these gardens first before their own. They did this because if a man was hungry, he went to the *inkosi* and said 'I am hungry' and he was given food to eat.

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In this account it is clear that the daily life of the Paramount had both private and public aspects. In private he was vulnerable to attacks from enemies. Hence he depended on the services of a trusted attendant to see that no sorcerers could make bad magic from his excreta; and he ate no food except that prepared by his own wives and mothers. On the other hand, in public he appeared as the generous and ceremonious ruler, providing food, beer and snuff for his visitors, and himself practising that restraint in eating which was characteristic of Ngoni good manners both from host and guest.

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In addition to the daily routine of sharing food with his immediate entourage and chance visitors, the Paramount had special feasts known as *izipheko*. These feasts, as described by Cibambo, were related to the bringing of tribute, thus emphasizing the reciprocal nature of the gifts passing between the people and the Paramount.

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Along with the tribute the *inkosi* had his feasts with which he wanted to feed his people. At an appointed time the *inkosi* and his wives and mothers prepared beer and three or four beasts for his men and women. Men ate their meat in the kraal but the women at the *indlunkulu*. All the people thanked him everywhere, including the women, and the men were thanking with dancing. Even although people were not called by the *inkosi*, yet many people came to his village to beg food from the *inkosi*. Also by telling the *izinduna* the *inkosi* would invite people to eat with him, and many would come from far away. The wives of the *inkosi* and his mothers were cooking soft or hard porridge, with different *imbido* (relishes) so that the *inkosi* could give them to his people. They would all be waiting in the kraal. A generous *inkosi* liked to stay in the kraal so that his food should be sent there in order to feed both notable people and poor people. He would be watching whom to give food to.

In this way although there was tribute (*imitulo*), it was not very burdensome. People did not complain to the *inkosi* about it. It was as if they were playing, because of the dancing. Those who had no wealth came to the *inkosi* and begged him to help them. The *inkosi* gave cattle to these people without asking them to pay again, because he said 'The people and the cattle, they are all mine. They are eating each other.'

There was an apparent contradiction here. On the one hand there was true reciprocity, that of the people who brought tribute or gifts and in

NGONILAND AND THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN IT

woman had her home. The other was the 'gate' of the kraal⁶²¹ at the opposite end of the enclosure to the 'big house'. The name by which this 'gate' was known applied also to the [417] space on each side of the gap in the kraal fence through which the cattle went out and came in—a gap which was closed at night with heavy poles. Here at the gate the men [512] of the village sat by day, ate their meals brought to them by children from their wives' huts, talked, received strangers, pursued their crafts, and supervised the return of the cattle in the evenings.

In and around the main huts within the tall reed fences, ³⁴² the life of a Ngoni household went on. Some of the huts were rectangular, others round. All had a veranda built up above the ground-level and shaded by the house roof. The back parts of the veranda were often enclosed with mats to make additional storage space. In old Ngoni households the open space around the hut was kept swept and mudded and polished like a floor, so that people could sit there in comfort and cleanliness as well as on the veranda. Near the house ⁴¹⁷ was one or more little reed platforms about five feet above the ground, where kitchen utensils, gourds and vegetables were laid to dry, and which were used to sit under as shelter from the sun in the hot months. Large and small wooden ⁴¹⁵ pounding mortars and poles, clay pots of every size and ³⁵² shape, mats for sleeping and for drying grain, baskets for many purposes, wooden food trays and spoons, gourds of several shapes, formed the traditional household equipment always to be seen outside and around the hut, as well as inside.

In each household, within the main hut, there were two ³⁵³ places of particular significance. One was by the two main ⁵⁹² door-posts at the entrance. These posts with the hollow for [354] the fireplace in the centre of the floor divided the hut into a right-hand and left-hand side—the men's side and the

¹ and ² A short list of the vernacular terms for some of these common Ngoni place-names is given at end of the book.

CHILDREN OF THEIR FATHERS

855 primarily within his mother's household, but also, and especially immediately after weaning, in his grandmother's household. His needs for food and warmth could in fact be met in any of the households which formed part of his father's house and family group. There was no greater contrast for the small boy about the age of seven between this kind of life in the women's compound and his plunge into the life of the boys' dormitory.

The father's role with young children

- 562 During day-time in Ngoni villages Ngoni men and women lived almost in two separate worlds, the women in their compounds, the men by the kraal gate or about the village. When important visitors arrived the veranda of the 'big house' became a general meeting-place. Chiefs and leading men who
- 574 [342] had acquired chairs, among other modern household furniture, preferred to entertain their guests on their own veranda [177] where they had some degree of privacy, and to offer them [352] chairs to sit on instead of the kraal fence to lean against. This use of chairs which they found more comfortable to sit on
- 512 brought many of the fathers of families back to their own verandas now and then during the day, though they continued to eat their meals with the other men at the kraal [264] gate, and to go there to discuss village affairs and watch over [521] the coming and going of the cattle.
- 593 This change of habit brought the fathers of families into closer touch with their young children, and it was accelerated by the growing Christian tradition in which fathers were [177] more closely associated with certain aspects of their children's upbringing. It was the father who arranged for the baptism of the children which took place in the local church and was a ceremony attended by most of the village, whether Christians or not. When an evangelist or a school-teacher conducted evening prayers, as they often did near the kraal [851] where anyone could come after the evening meal, Christian fathers sometimes carried a child in their arms to the prayers. [782]

FAMILY LIFE FOR THE YOUNG CHILD

after the age of four or five, when they might become aware⁸⁶⁷ that intercourse was taking place. From this age, when the Ngoni said 'they will now begin to see things and to ask⁸⁶⁴ questions', they went to sleep either with a widowed grandmother or senior helper.

During the 'dark half of the month' and in the rains, most people went to bed soon after dark and little children got a long sleep. When the moon was bright, and in dry weather, the whole village was astir, walking around, dancing, talking, visiting. Little children tagged round with their older sisters or nurse girls, and if they were sleepy were either picked up and carried, or put in the hut to sleep on their mat, provided there was no fire burning into which they could fall. During the day, especially in the hot weather, children dropped off to sleep just where they were, on the veranda, under the platform, or in some other shady spot.

It was just before bedtime, in the grandmother's hut, that traditional folk-tales were told, round the last flickers of a wood fire. Sometimes a child dropped off to sleep before the story was finished. Someone either took him on her lap, or dumped him on his mat and covered him up. ^[538]

This acquiring of habits, directed consciously by adults, ⁸⁶⁷ was designed to give the child increasingly a sense of being ⁸⁵⁸ part of a community which had certain standards of behaviour. There were, in this training, some prohibitions which a child was expected to observe as soon as he could walk and talk. The most stringent was on any form of sex play between boys and girls. To avoid any likelihood of this, little boys and girls were early encouraged to form separate play groups. The elders kept an eye particularly on the boys, and if they showed any inquisitiveness in their play about the private parts of a girl playmate, they were beaten and reproved and told: 'If you do this again, I shall tell your father.'

Many little boys and girls up to the age of four or five ran ⁸⁶⁴ about naked, but in leading Ngoni families they wore a scrap ²⁹¹

VILLAGE LIFE FOR OLDER BROTHERS AND SISTERS

given to giggling and putting their head on one side when asked questions. They took their school work seriously in order to show that they, the Ngoni girls, were the intelligent ones. They were also aware that the number of cattle to be transferred at their marriage would be greater according to whether they finished school in Standard II, III, IV, or even VI. 561
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Apart from going to school, which was only for the daughters of relatively forward-looking Ngoni fathers, the girls continued to take part in the daily routine of the household. They and their companions, according to their growth and strength and pleasure, did a little pounding, fetching water, grinding grain, roasting ground-nuts. In a large household, where there were many helpers, the daughters of the family only did as much as they felt inclined of the domestic chores. As they said: 'It was like our play.' They spent more time with the young children, or washing themselves and their clothes by the stream. Combing and dressing their hair, rubbing fat or oil on their skin, threading beads, plaiting grass or fibres, learning how to make Ngoni bead designs for head bands or wristlets—all these formed the lighter and more amusing side of the daily routine. 561
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From among the girls in this exclusive and protected girls' circle, Ngoni girls chose a particular friend, whom they always addressed as 'my friend', even if she were a classificatory sister or cousin. As with the boys in the dormitory this friend was a confidante to whom a girl could talk freely about her life in the compound, her likes and dislikes among the other girls and women, her ideas about suitors and marriage. The friend was always from another compound and of a leading Ngoni clan. The two friends made bracelets and necklets for each other, and went to bathe in the stream together. Sometimes the friendship lasted until the girls were married and separated. At times it broke up suddenly in a violent quarrel. There was however a curious tenacity about these friendship pacts, and they were more often maintained 572

888 Yet the position of the old women of the village was a highly
 [62] powerful one. The mother of the headman was almost more
 enter a new village to win the kindly favour of the old grand-
 mother first of all. Then we are sure we have found a way to the
 son's heart. One of the most beautiful things in our tribal life
 is the honour which is paid to the grey hairs of the village. The
 bent and helpless old men who lived through the glorious fighting
 [62] days, and understand all precedent and etiquette are the judges
 and councillors. And no case can be tried, no decision can be
 made, until the old men give their presence and their opinion.
 It is hard when the young are leaping ahead of their fathers
 through education to maintain this veneration for the elders.
 Yet it is the very backbone of the tribe. There is nothing more
 contemptible than an African or an Asiatic with a veneer of
 education who affects to despise the elders of the village. But I
 know no more pathetic sight than our afternoon schools where
 grey-haired men and women may be seen peering through
 faded eyes trying also to learn to read and keep abreast of
 the young and alert life, while the sun goes down in their
 eventide.

233 The Ngoni were first of all a fighting people, and then a
 [18] pastoral. Their land affords splendid pasture for cattle. And
 they take great pride in their herds. Round the cattle kraal
 centre all their ambitions, and highest delights, and best intelli-
 gence. They sit and watch the cattle going out in the early
 morning and coming in in the evening, and know every spot and
 colour of their beautiful animals. The quietest and most peaceful
 sight I know is when the sun goes down, and the fierce heat has
 [53] given place to the welcome cool of the evening. Then you will
 hear the music of reed pipes, and looking up you see a long line
 [51] of sleek, solemn cows, with large silken dew laps, and fat humps,
 slowly coming up the village path lowing for their calves, while
 boys ride, on their backs sitting or standing upright, balancing
 themselves carefully and blowing on their pipes. Before and
 behind them runs a troop of goats and sheep bleating with such a
 human cry. In a moment the village is alive—sheep and goats
 are chased back and forward till they find the huts where they
 sleep with their masters. And boys run out with wooden pails
 [23] into which they milk what the calves have not sucked from their
 mothers.